

Dear Judge,

I hope this letter finds you well. My name is Taylon Sandlin, and I'm a career pilot and small business owner. I'm reaching out to share some thoughts about my friend Keith Diemer, whose actions in October 2022 have led him to appear before your court.

I met Keith nearly 20 years ago at the Indianapolis Air Show, where he volunteered. He quickly became an integral part of our community of hot air balloonists too, known for his impeccable reliability and affable nature. Over the years, Keith evolved into my primary crew chief and a great friend, joining me on countless flight operations across more than a dozen states with hundreds of hours in very close proximity. He's even attended my Thanksgiving dinner. I have seen him in the most stressful moments, and vice versa. Through it all, I never saw the slightest hint of malice or aggression towards anyone.

Keith is a little different than most people, in all good ways. He is the colloquial boy scout, and it's no facade. He does not drink, smoke, or curse. He's an expert in everything from radio frequencies to beekeeping. He is always easy going and makes friends everywhere. He is one of the most reliable friends I have ever met, and you could always count on him showing up with eagerness and a great attitude.

I will not downplay the harm and fear his actions caused for everyone involved. I am intimately tied to aviation, and have a deep love for the city of Albuquerque – my former home. The incident was a stark departure from Keith's true character, a lapse in judgment that I know he deeply regrets but accepts he will have to pay for. I can't imagine what he was thinking that day but I know in my heart of hearts that he would never hurt a soul.

Since then, I've witnessed firsthand the toll this has taken on him, both physically – he's lost easily 100 pounds – and emotionally. His light has dimmed, his cheer has faded. Despite the weight of this prolonged uncertainty of his fate, Keith has continued to accept responsibility for his actions, expressing deep remorse and never shifting blame or making excuses – because there are none.

I, too, carry regret. I purchased Keith's flight ticket so he could join us for Balloon Fiesta; he was recovering from Covid and had to join us midway to be safe. This didn't work; we all caught it – maybe it even had some small impact here. I wish I could go back and just have him stay home, but life does not work that way. I can only ask - nay, plead - that Keith's future isn't defined by this one terrible day but by his thousands of positive days. There must be accountability, but locking him up for any extended period only makes a bad situation worse. He has so much to give and deserves a shot at redemption.

Thank you for taking the time to read my letter,

Taylon Sandlin | 1/31/2024 | 11170 E 111th Street, Fishers, IN 46038

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